



# Touched

*A.J. Aalto*

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## **Touched** A.J. Aalto

The media has a nickname for Marnie Baranuik, though she'd rather they didn't; they call her the Great White Shark, a rare dual-talented forensic psychic. Twice-Touched by the Blue Sense--which gives her the ability to feel the emotions of others, and read impressions left behind on objects--Marnie also has a doctorate in preternatural biology and a working knowledge of the dark arts. She is considered without peer in the psychic community.

Then her first big FBI case ended with a bullet in one shoulder and a chip on the other, a queasy heart and a serial killer in the wind, leaving her a public flop and a private wreck. When the FBI's preternatural crimes unit tracks her down at a remote mountain lodge for her insight on a local case, her quiet retirement is promptly besieged by a stab-happy starlet, a rampaging ghoul, and a vampire-hunting jackass in tight Wranglers. Marnie figures the only real mystery is which one will kill her first.

Too mean to die young, backed up by friends in cold places, and running with a mouth as demure as a cannon's blast, Marnie Baranuik is about to discover that there's no such thing as quitting time when you're Touched.

## **Touched Details**

Date : Published September 18th 2011 by AJ Aalto

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Author : A.J. Aalto

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## From Reader Review Touched for online ebook

### ? Irena ? says

It's been a while since I've read an urban fantasy with a female protagonist. The last one was two months ago and the one before that was four months ago. Both were quite good, but I realized I am anxious every time I start an urban fantasy series featuring the same character. Sooner or later, an author adds something that messes up either the story, the world, the main character or all the above.

But I am persistent.

The rules of this world are interesting. The supernatural is neither completely laughed at nor is it accepted by everyone. Government agencies use psychics to help them in their cases, the world is a couple of steps closer to the supernatural than ours is.

The source of psychics' talents is always a vampire. There is no real psychic without one. In exchange for the power and talents, a DaySitter takes care of vampire's needs.

Marnie Baranuik is a white witch and a DaySitter who inherited her grandmother's vampire Harry. The less you think about their arrangement (especially in regards to the past), the better. Marnie calls them revenants since the term 'vampire' is not right. That doesn't stop her other love interest, an FBI agent and a former vampire hunter Mark Batten, to call them vampires.

The whole book is setting up stage for various relationships between four or five characters (I'm hoping Wes is there to stay since he is an interesting character). They do have a case though and it involves lots of magic, a dismembered twelve-year old girl, an insane stalkerish psychic and more deaths than Marnie expected.

The book has the weirdest triangle I've ever read. I hate them in any form, but this one so weird that I ended up wishing both 'love' interests stay. I would hardly call it a love triangle since there isn't a lot of love there. Lust, yes. I thought I would hate Mark (the agent), but in the end I almost felt sorry for the guy. In the beginning we find out that Marnie and Mark were together on a case, had sex and then she found out about his fiancée. I almost stopped reading there since that's one page too many to read about a cheater. It's all good though since none of it true which brings me to one of my issues with the book: Marnie continues with her hostile lust through the whole book. She doesn't have any reason to hate the guy anymore.

Another one is: Marnie is beautiful, but she thinks of herself as Plain Jane (that one was really annoying).

Marnie is scatter-brained. She makes so many mistakes that I wanted to kill her myself. She goes alone when she shouldn't, she doesn't bring weapons when she should, she brings a weapon then she doesn't use it, she is lusting after two characters, and so on.

The two FBI agents are nothing special. Mark is a good looking former vampire hunter who seems to be in love with Marnie. His colleague, on the other hand, is not very honest about his reasons for wanting to help. That part of this story and how it was resolved (if you can call it that) was not enjoyable to read. I expect the issue with agent Chapel to become bigger later.

Harry annoyed me most of the time. Every time Marnie got an opportunity to tell him about his mistakes, he managed to turn what she says against her. Every single time.

Then there is this: *"Second Cannon from Marie-Pierrette's journal", 'Seventh Cannon: know whom you're dealing with.'* and this *'...don't respect laws and don't adhere to cannons.'*

I didn't mention everything that happens in this book of course. Overall, it isn't bad, it is a decent start of an urban fantasy series. It could even be refreshing in having a crazy scatter-brained and indecisive character that might grow into a great one instead of a supposedly awesome strong woman that turns into a doormat later in the series.

I may read the next one too. For a first book in a series, it has just enough to keep me interested if not for the main character alone, then for other things.

Oh, and there are zombies too, only they are not calling them that.

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## **Shelby \*trains flying monkeys\* says**

I have gotten to where I do not like vampire books. I read a ton of the Black Dagger Brotherhood books and completely loved their cheesiness at the time, but I grew bored of them. I probably would not have requested this one from Netgalley if I had realized that one of the main characters was a vampire or Revenant as he had rather be called.

I would have lost out on a book series that I think I'm going to love.

The main character Marnie is twice gifted forensic psychic. She had been working with the FBI helping them to solve crimes until she and one of the FBI guys did the horizontal mambo and she was shot by a Revenant in the line of duty. She quit.

The case of a dead twelve year old brings her hot FBI guy, Mark Batten and his boss back to her door asking for help. The girl's head ends up in Marnie's mailbox and another psychic witch decides she wants Marnie dead. She also happens to want Marnie's Cold Companion Harry. Harry is Marnie's Revenant, she functions as his day-sitter supplying him with his blood supply. It sounds so full of shit doesn't it? I thought so too, but danged if this book doesn't grab you and keep you entertained.

Marnie's skills come from psi energy from Harry so she can craft up a few witchy spells too.

Those come in handy when a ghoul is now on her ass.

Marnie is pretty kick ass during the whole book. She is snarky and has a gift for always getting everything she attempts to do wrong. No Mary-Sue's allowed for this character.

She does let a ton of her personal drama effect how she handles problems as they pop up. That did annoy me at times but then she would threaten to beat the crap outta someone and my attention would return.

Now there is the dreaded love triangle that happens in the story and the weird thing is..for this book it works.

Maybe the love triangle works in this one because Marnie knows if they both get on her nerves she still has "Mr. Buzz" (her 9 inch purple vibrator)

I honestly couldn't decide which one I wanted her to be with the most. Mark Batten the hot FBI guy, he was snarky and he was an asshole most of the time. I wanted to bang him.

**Something about the way Batten stood, legs spread wide and sturdy, owning his space with a military bearing, shoulders back, jaw tight, made me wanna hit him with a hammer then sit in his lap and suck his tongue a little.**

Then Harry. I can't believe I liked a vampire/revenant character. I did though. English, perfect manners, a bit of a receding hairline. I kept picturing him as this guy.

Totally bangable in a weird place in my head.

I'm totally rambling about hot guys. \*head desk\* I'll turn into one of those vampie fangirls before we know it and then we will all be doomed.

Anyways, read this book if you want a different type of urban/paranormal fiction. There were a few problems with it but not enough that I wanted to shoot anyone. (Harry's calling Marnie his only love a few too many times, His weird English sayings)

**"She's an everyday, person, relatable, touchable."**

**"Hear that?" Carrie teased. "You're touchable. Like quilted toilet paper."**

**"Spendid," I said sourly. "Must be why the world wipes its ass with me."**

**Kids know. Pulling your blankets up over your head fools some monsters. If they can't see you, they give up and stumble off down the hall to eat your parents.**

**"What are you, a James Bond villain?" I said. "The least hot Bond girl ever? Pussy NoMore?"**

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## **Zeek says**

What I liked about this one, I liked quite a bit- enjoyed the voice the author gave her main character Marnie- surprisingly the potty mouth worked for me- *really* liked the love interest(s)- interesting twists and turns. Didn't like all the witchy stuff and MAN is she fairly graphic- in fact, if I was *watching* this, i'd be covering my eyes. But then, can zombie-like ghouls be anything but gross, I mean, really?

Marnie, recently retired paranormal consultant is sucked back in with the gory death of a young girl that has much of the paranormal involved. If it were not for the fact her one time f!ckbuddy is the one who's re-recruiting her, she'd be a little less reluctant.

But jump in she does, and the person- and reason- behind the murder is much more involved than she ever imagined- and much more surprising.

Like I said, I liked the characters, enough to want to read the next book, but this first one has a few issues- too much meandering and I was a bit startled with where she went relationship-wise. Not sure I'm okay with it, BUT she didn't close doors AND surprising this jaded reader is never a bad thing.

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## Sh3llraiser (grumpybookgrrrl) says

All 3 of these books are on Netgalley: August 2, 2015.

### NEW FAVORITE ALERT!

Holy shit, this was brilliant! I can't even. Ok, I \*may\* be a little biased because I do love a good vampire novel. But this is not your average cheesy typical vampire book. Some of it is recognizable (needing an invitation to come in your house, holy water, etc.), but the little extras and world-building is fantabulous!!!

Marnie is a psychic who used to work for the police, but screwed up a job (well, it wasn't entirely her fault), so she quit and became a hermit and her self-esteem took a big hit. But the bureau/agency/whatever they are won't leave her alone, so she gets sucked back in to work on a case. And she lives with a vampire (called a Revenant in this world - vampire is considered a derogatory label). The relationship between psychics and vamp-I mean Revenants- is really cool. I won't go into it because the less you know, the better.

There's kind of a love triangle, which I usually DETEST, but it's honestly not annoying here. I like both of the guys really, but **of course**, I'm **TEAM HARRY**. This is my Harry:

The other romantic interest is one of the agency guys named Batten. He's also a Revenant hunter with over a hundred kills. This is my Batten:

I don't want to say too much about this book because it's just so awesome, you should read it. It's a decent-sized book and there's not constant action going on (although there is plenty of it), but the writing and world-building and HUMOR is just fantastic. I am so reading all of this series.

One thing I do hope is that as the series continues, Marnie gets a little bit more bad-ass. I love her magic skills, but she does a few dumb things. It's forgivable in a first book. I would love to see her able to be stronger. She is hilarious, though. There are several LOL lines in this. I can't really figure out how I picture Marnie, but something like a younger Helen Slater from The Legend of Billie Jean (80s outfit not included):

**Sigh, Harry. <3**

*I received a copy of this from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review. I love it when you score a winner from Netgalley! :)*

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## **JAIME says**

This was some of the best smart ass banter I think I have ever read. In saying that though, I took a star off, because I'm not sure the actual story was anything to rave about - It was overshadowed by a whole bunch of curse words that I took careful note of to make sure they end up in my vocabulary. Can't wait to see my Mum's face when I call someone a 'fucksock'.

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## **XX Sarah XX (former Nefarious Breeder of Murderous Crustaceans) says**

► **Jan. 2, 2018:** FREE today!!!

[May 30, 2015]

► Sh3lly seems to think this is a pretty fantastic book. Hahahaha. We'll see if it passes the **Sarah Hates Everything Test** (SHET™).

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## **Claudia says**

I wrote my review but obviously my computer wasn't happy with it and decided not to save it. So here just a short account of my feelings for this book

I was really disappointed with this book: I had high hopes but the book just couldn't deliver

The heroine was a whiny spoiled childish person who did not think about other people, Harry who could have been very interesting was really cold and Batten was not really consistent in his character.

The idea of the symbiosis between psychic and vampire was interesting but never fully developed or explained

I hate love triangles but this was even more of a mess and hurtful than most. Marnie's relationship with both men just seemed like cheating all of the time and that is something I can't stand

All in all not a book I would recommend

Disclaimer: an ARC was provided by Netgalley in exchange for an honest review

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## **Aisling Zena says**

**4 stars**

### *Minor spoilers ahead*

This is the kind of book that grips you from the first few sentences with excellent world building, action and snarkiness in equal measures. Unfortunately for me, it also has one of my most dreaded pet peeves. A triangle. And I didn't know it till I was about 25% in that that was the direction it was taking. I should have clued in sooner...

I hate triangles. Very, very few books have made me read them and actually enjoy them and sympathize with the h. Usually we're stuck trying to pick one of the Heroes which sucks because either one of them turns "bad"/"not good enough" for the heroine or whatever bullshit reason the author comes up with. Typically it's the one you're rooting for because heaven forbid any heroine that picks the sensible choice. And this is my problem here.

We have Agent Batten, human, FBI and former vampire hunter. Who has insane chemistry with our Marnie Baranuik. Insanely hot chemistry like break-the-door-you're-having-sex-against hot. Every time Marnie looks at Batten they fight, bicker, sass each other while secretly thinking of boinking each others brains out. Naturally, while reading this and since he was mentioned first I sort of got attached to Agent "Kill-Notch".

Imagine my surprise when after I've settled in and looking forward to Marnie's and Batten's explosive meetings, a wrench is thrown in all my yummy fantasies. Specifically, a wrench called Harry. And it's no small wrench either. It's shaped like a vampire, excuse me, revenant in this book. Lord Dreppenstedt aka Harry, a British peer that lives with Marnie. He is her Cold Companion and irrevocably connected to her. Not only that, he is the reason Marnie has powers to begin with. She feeds Harry and in return Harry shares his powers with her through their Bond. He's British, takes care of her in a million little ways and tries to protect her. So you see, now I'm in a conundrum and don't know who to pick or root for. Which I loathe.

This isn't even the main plot of the book. The triangle is there in full effect with each of Marnie's interactions with either man but there's so much more going on that you soon lose sight of the triangle as such and focus on the intricacies of the world building. The powers, the do's and don't's, the twists that keep popping up out of nowhere. A deranged starlet, a rampaging ghoul and so much more. This was one action packed book with a heroine that's less than inept, constantly failing but not in an aggravating way. I did get a tad annoyed with how much Marnie runs her mouth though towards the end and that along with the infernal triangle did deduct a star from this. Even so, I really want to know what happens next which is annoying me even more as I still can't pick who she should end up with.

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### **Tyler Tork says**

I didn't finish this one because I couldn't bring myself to care what happens to the characters and because it annoyed me in several different and creative ways. The writing isn't bad, but there were so many things wrong that I couldn't enjoy reading it.

Specifically:

- The protagonist is insecure and whiny and foul-mouthed, and I can't see what her sophisticated vampire



buddy sees in her.

- The vampire, Harry, is constantly a jerk asshole and nobody ever calls him on it, including the tough-ass FBI vampire hunter. For instance, he constantly uses precious British slang expressions of his youth, despite that he's had a two centuries to learn new idioms in a different country. He's not too stupid to learn modern English; it's some sort of superiority game.
  - Could not believe that (view spoiler). This was so transparent and the characters so obtuse and the items in question mentioned so often, that it was the annoyance that kept on giving for the entire first half of the book.
  - Needs a good copy edit. The word "cannon" to mean a principle, for instance. Drives me wild.
  - Numerous plot irrationalities that transparently serve the author's purpose. For instance, (view spoiler) and (view spoiler) or that (view spoiler).
  - I suppose it's a convention of the genre that the female protagonist would be obsessed by the bad boy FBI agent's hot bod, but it's not a convention I find appealing. Especially since this protagonist is a weak character in so many other ways.
  - Numerous cliches used without any apparent attempt at humor. E.g. newt eyeballs -- really?
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## **Rick Gualtieri says**

This book is an absolute steal! Can't decide between a horror story, an adventure, a romance perhaps, or maybe even a comedy? Look no further. Touched is one of those rare books that spans multiple genres and makes it work.

The writing is fast paced and filled with lots of fun characters including the heroine, Marnie Baranuik. She's the female equivalent of Harry Dresden with a couple of extra neurosis and a major caffeine addiction thrown in.

If you like slow paced stories, this isn't for you. Don't expect a moment to breath as the author throws murder, monsters, and a little naughtiness at the reader at every turn, all coupled with Marnie's manic and often hilarious thoughts.

About the only downside I saw in this novel is that since the story is told from Marnie's first person perspective, her musings and perspective can make the action scenes a little chaotic sometimes. However, this is minor and in no way takes away from the enjoyment of seeing her and her allies stumble from one adventure to the next.

I highly recommend it and look forward to what AJ Aalto has next to offer the world.

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## **Elena says**

Read for the **URR Halloween 2017 Reading Challenge: a romance novel with a skull on the cover.**

**Touched** is a weird book. A book of contrasts and opposites ~~masterfully blended together~~... clashing against each other for something like 450 pages. My head hurts. I stayed up way too late last night reading it: I couldn't put it down and/but it was boring me to death. Now I don't know whether to jump on Death Rejoices or drop the series for good. I find myself in the awkward position of simultaneously agreeing with a friend

who gave the book 5 stars and a rave review and another who DNFed it. Awkward, I'm telling you.

Because I could argue that this was a really fun read and just as easily that it was a boring mess. I dunno. Like, I *really* do not know. So, let's see:

❶ **Marnie is hilarious.** Her character rings true, too: flawed, insecure one minute, assertive another, confused about where exactly she stands in life and what she wants from it, a self-centered, self-conscious little mess. Her banters with the other characters were super amusing - I actually LOled a couple of times. Marnie's definitely a fun character to spend some time with.

» *Some time* being the keyword here: because Marnie might be pretty hilarious but **450 pages inside her head are waay too many**. Also: there's being hilarious and then there's being an idiot. Marnie is often an idiot. A cringeworthy one. And I'm tired of reading about women who don't know how to wear skirts or high heels. Is it supposed to be endearing? She's a 27 years old FBI consultant, for fu\*k's sake, not a female yeti.

❷ **The love triangle works pretty well**, especially because is not really about love at all - these kids are quite the practical types, you see, so we're spared the angsty, cheesy mess we usually have to deal with in pnr. Cool! I like it when people call things by their names, so \*thumbs up\* for Aalto.

» **But the relationship between Marnie, Harry and Mark really takes up too much space.** Touched is 75% made of people lusting after each other, 20% of description of Marnie eating biscuits, Harry's wardrobe and Mark's sculpted ass and 5% of grisly, gory fights against feral ghouls. Less talk, more action, guys - we're all adults, here! Or, you know, just less talk.

❸ **The worldbuilding is cool:** standard uf ingredients (vampires, werewolves, witches, the world-just-discovered-the-monsters-are-real-and-is-still-getting-used-to-it stuff) all mixed up together in a bizarre, original blend.

» But while I enjoyed the fast pace the plot picked up almost immediately, half of the time I had no idea what was going on, or why. There was this **weird juxtaposition of too much info / not enough info** going on that made keeping tracks of things really hard: *I* was disoriented, *the characters* were disoriented and thus kept messing up, nothing really gets done (besides the lusting, obviously) until the end of the book.

❹ **I loved Aalto's humor:** some scenes were deliriously funny.

» But perhaps if you're going for a screwball comedy-type of story you might want to leave out beheaded 12 years old girls whose eyes have been gouged out from their sockets; or nightmarish sequences where rotting ghouls with abnormally long tongues are trying to go down on sleepeng women. Just saying. **The darkest moments of the book don't have any gravitas**, especially since nobody really gives two shits about anything that's going on (except for the lusting, of course: there's never a bad enough time for that).

Also, Touched **fails the Bechdel test in the most spectacular fashion I've seen in a while**. It's like a major flip off to the test, really. 'kay, I guess. Afterall, who needs female characters interaction when you can simply have them try and kill each other?

But in the end, whether you're going to like this book or not will really depend on your tolerance for Aalto's sense of humor and for Marnie's antics: personally, I need a break from both.

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**Tanja ~ T's Book ~ KT Book Reviews says**

The easiest way to explain Touched... If Janet Evanovich and Charlaine Harris had a book baby, with a side

of Darynda Jones.

Touched is a quirky paranormal romance love triangle with a snarky well-meaning gal, who has waaaaay to many paranormal beings and issues vying for her attention.

It was funny and engrossing. I liked the quick wit and the mystery that surrounded Marnie. Her vamp and the seriously sexy FBI guy both want her to help each of them in different ways. We are left constantly wanting to know more about why that is.

For the frugal reader Touched is a great deal as far as cost and book length. (Currently it's free on Kindle Unlimited)

Did I love this read? Yes, although it could become a tad monotonous here and there prompting some skim reading. Did I like the characters? Yes! All were good, solid characters I became invested in. Did I like the love tri-angle? Yes and no. I was torn and still am. I like both guys, but felt like Marnie was using them both too. Will I continue with the series? I am not sure. Why? Well, it was a very long read and like I said before, I did skim read a bit here and there. I don't feel like Marnie will choose my pick for her either... I dunno maybe it's too soon to say yes or no. Maybe will be my answer for that question. Was it worth the read? YES! I have found a new author I am very interested in. AJ Alto is going on my watch list for sure!

4.5 Star read

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## **Monty Cupcake ? Queen of Bloodshed ? says**

2.5 stars. Review to come.

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### **AH says**

Awesome! Loved this!

Yay! I have found a new urban fantasy series to love! Excuse me a moment while I do my best fan girl squee! The Marnie Baranuik Files combines humor, magic, and some scary monsters for a laugh out loud exhilarating read. And because I loved it, I had to share the love and spread the word. This is truly a hidden gem. Don't miss this book.

OK. Fan girl moment over.

The first book of The Marnie Baranuik Files, **Touched**, focuses on Marnie Baranuik, a retired forensic psychic for the FBI's Preternatural Crime Unit. Marnie is quite talented, not only is she an empath (Feeler), she can also read objects just by touch (Groper). Marnie also holds degrees in Preternatural Biology and she is also a practitioner of witchcraft.

I adored Marnie. She has an amazing sense of humor and she loves her junk food, so the sugar addict in me can easily relate to her, especially for her love of cookies. Marnie's inner voice cracked me up and her knowledge of all things paranormal was impressive. Marnie tends to be a walking disaster, unintentionally wreaking havoc and requiring rescue. I didn't see her as "too stupid to live," however there were moments when I questioned her motives.

The men in Marnie's life were quite interesting. It's hard to decide if I'm on Team Harry or Team Mark. Marnie is a Day Sitter for her Cold Comfort and housemate Harry, who she "inherited" from her grandmother. Harry is a vampire, although in this book all vampires are referred to as revenants. Marnie is to keep Harry safe in the daytime while he "sleeps" and to supply him with blood (hers). Marnie and Harry share a bond, though in this book, the bond is a little wonky. Harry is very fastidious and he likes the finer things in life. Harry is such an interesting character. He's over 400 years old and loves to speak with archaic and obscure language. Harry cares a great deal for Marnie and even bakes her cookies and brownies.

Personally, I think I'd be Team Mark. Mark is an ex-vampire hunter. He is an imposing character, all man and muscle and broodiness. Marnie has fond memories of a stakeout tryst with Mark and those memories form a constant part of her inner dialogue. The sexual tension between these two is electric, and even though Marnie "hates" Mark, her body remembers...

The world building is fascinating. **Touched** takes place in Boulder, Colorado. This is a world where vampires or revenants are followed by debt vultures that wait for the vampire to die. The debt vultures attract other scary critters like flesh eating beetles and carrion spiders – eww!

The author's sense of humor cracked me up. There are some really funny lines in the book:

"What are you, a James Bond villain?" I said. "The least-hot Bond-girl ever? Pussy No-More?"

The ongoing jokes between the characters were funny. Marnie collects things with frogs – and suddenly all the frogs had little black marker fangs.

If you are looking for a new urban fantasy series with a snarky heroine and some manly men, then look no further. **Touched** by A.J. Aalto is a great addition to the urban fantasy genre. I can't wait to read more by this author.

*Thank you to the publisher for a review copy of this book.*

**Review posted on Badass Book Reviews.**

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**Danielle The Book Huntress (Back to the Books) says**

This book was just...wow! I'll have to come up with a better review for Bitten by Books.

Overall rating: **4.5/5.0 stars.**

Reviewed for Bitten by Books. <http://bittenbybooks.com>.

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